

SPECIAL FEATURE NO. 3-2190
LINDA CASHDAN

AUGUST 29, 1978

BRUCE CATTON
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ANNCR:

BRUCE CATTON, AMERICA'S BEST KNOWN CIVIL WAR HISTORIAN DIED THIS WEEK (AUG. 28) AT THE AGE OF 78. LINDA CASHDAN TAKES A LOOK AT THE MAN:

VOICE:

BORN IN A SMALL TOWN IN THE MIDWESTERN STATE OF MICHIGAN AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY, BRUCE CATTON WAS A NEWSPAPER MAN LONG BEFORE HE WAS AN AUTHOR. INDEED, CATTON'S FIRST BOOK - A NOVEL WRITTEN WHEN HE WAS IN HIS THIRTIES -- WAS NEVER EVEN PUBLISHED. ONE PUBLISHER SAID THE PLOT WAS BAD, BUT PRAISED THE CHARACTERIZATIONS, AND A SECOND PUBLISHER PRAISED THE PLOT BUT CRITICIZED THE CHARACTERIZATIONS. BOTH REJECTED THE BOOK OUTRIGHT, AND -- BRUCE CATTON RECALLED LATER IN HIS LIFE -- IT WAS THEN THAT HE DECIDED THAT BOOK WRITING WAS NOT FOR HIM.

HAPPILY, HE CHANGED HIS MIND. HE WROTE HIS FIRST PUBLISHED BOOK -- "WAR LORDS OF WASHINGTON" -- WHEN HE WAS FORTY NINE, AND WHEN IT WAS GENERALLY WELL RECEIVED, HE WENT ON TO WRITE ABOUT THE SUBJECT THAT WAS THE PASSION OF HIS YOUTH, THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR.

TAPE: CUT ONE -- CATTON

"YOU SEE, I KNEW A LOT OF THE OLD VETERANS IN OUR LITTLE TOWN IN MICHIGAN AND I TALKED WITH THEM, LOOKED UP TO THEM, AND HEARD THEIR STORIES AND FROM THEN ON, IT WAS A KIND OF A SPECIAL SUBJECT FOR ME. THEN AS I GREW OLDER, I READ EVERYTHING I COULD FIND ABOUT IT. WHEN I MOVED TO THE CITY OF WASHINGTON IN 1939, I STARTED VISITING BATTLE FIELDS AND OF COURSE I WAS HOOKED."

VOICE:

CATTON LATER JOKED THAT HIS WIFE AND SON THOUGHT HE WAS CRAZY ONE COLD AND RAINY DAY WHEN HE INSISTED THAT THE FAMILY WANDER

WITH HIM THROUGH A CIVIL WAR BATTLEFIELD IN FREDERICKSBURG, MARYLAND. BUT IF THEY DID, THEY LATER UNDERSTOOD. HIS FASCINATION RESULTED IN 12 BOOKS ON THE CIVIL WAR, ONE OF WHICH, "A STILLNESS AT APPOMATTOX" WON BOTH THE NATIONAL BOOK AWARD AND THE PULITZER PRIZE IN 1954. THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE HE INSISTED THAT "HISTORY IS A BRANCH OF LITERATURE," AND HIS WRITING PROVED THAT HISTORY NEED NOT BE BORING TO BE ACCURATE. ONE OF A RARE BREED WHO MANAGED TO BE BOTH A SUPERB STORY TELLER AND A DEDICATED HISTORIAN, CATTON COMBINED DETAIL, DESCRIPTION, AND ANECDOTES TOGETHER WITH AN ENgrossing NARRATIVE. HE MADE THE HISTORY OF THE CIVIL WAR COME ALIVE, AND JOINED HIS NAME INEXTRICABLY TO THAT HISTORY.

HE WROTE OTHER BOOKS AS WELL. INDEED, HIS FOUR LAST BOOKS WERE NOT ABOUT THE CIVIL WAR. ONE -- "WAITING FOR THE MORNING TRAIN" WAS AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRE OF SIMPLER TIMES IN HIS HOME STATE OF MICHIGAN.

TAPE: CUT TWO -- CATTON

"IT OCCURRED TO ME THAT YOUTH, ANYBODY'S YOUTH, IS LIKE WAITING AT THE RAILROAD STATION FOR THE MORNING TRAIN. YOUTH KNOWS THAT HE'S NOT GOING TO BE WHERE HE IS VERY MUCH LONGER. PRETTY SOON HE'S GOING TO GET ON THE TRAIN AND TAKE A LONG JOURNEY. HE DOESN'T KNOW WHERE HE'S GOING, HOW FAR IT IS, OR WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN TO HIM. HE JUST KNOWS THAT THE GREAT ADVENTUROUS TRIP LIES AHEAD OF HIM. THEN, OF COURSE, THE OTHER END OF LIFE, OLD AGE, ALSO IS WAITING AT A RAILROAD STATION FOR A TRAIN TO TAKE OFF TO AN UNKNOWN DESTINATION. THIS TIME IT'S A NIGHT TRAIN."

VOICE:

THE VOICE OF BRUCE CATTON, AMERICAN HISTORIAN AND PULITZER PRIZE WINNING AUTHOR, WHO DIED THIS WEEK AT THE AGE OF SEVENTY EIGHT IN HIS NATIVE STATE OF MICHIGAN.

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